

The Hon. George Miller
Senior Democrat, Committee on Education and the Workforce
February 11, 2004
House Budget Committee Hearing
on the Bush Administration's FY '05 Education Budget

Good morning, Chairman Nussle, Ranking Member Spratt, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Bush Administration's fiscal year 2005 Education Budget. This is the 4th budget sent to Congress by the Bush Administration. Like the three Bush budgets that preceded it, this budget demonstrates that this Administration does not view education as a priority.

If this Bush budget were enacted into law, it would amount to the smallest increase in education funding in 9 years. In addition, it eliminates 38 education programs, reducing the Federal investment in education by \$1.4 billion. We need to invest in our education system -- to close the achievement gap, and to ensure access to a college education for all eligible students. President Bush's budget fails on both accounts.

The Bush budget continues to renege on the commitment to fully fund the No Child Left Behind Act. This year the Bush Budget underfunds the No Child Left Behind Act by \$9.4 billion. As part of this shortfall, the Bush budget underfunds the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program by \$1 billion, eliminating afterschool programs for over 1.3 million children. The Title I program is underfunded by \$7.2 billion. The Bush Budget leaves nearly 5 million disadvantaged children without extra academic help and services. Cumulatively, President Bush and the Republican Congress have underfunded NCLB by \$27 billion since its enactment.

NCLB placed new challenges on our schools and teachers – challenges it is important that our educators meet: eliminating the achievement gap between poor and minority students and other students; improving accountability; upgrading teacher quality. Our communities are working hard to live up to their end of the bargain. When are the Bush Administration and Congress going to live up to theirs?

Instead, we have radical, unjustified and unnecessary cuts in proven, effective education programs. Among these programs are initiatives to reduce alcohol use by teenagers, to ensure elementary school children have enough counselors, to reduce the number of students who drop out of school, and to provide family literacy programs to allow parents to be a greater part of their child's education.

Lets take one example – Even Start's support of family literacy programs. These initiatives have long enjoyed bipartisan support. Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, when he was the Governor of Pennsylvania, called family literacy "a dramatic investment" in the future of young Americans that will allow "parents and children [to] learn and succeed together."

Similarly, First Lady Laura Bush has expressed her support for family literacy programs, saying: "Family literacy programs...work on the front lines of the battle against illiteracy."

But the Bush budget would eliminate family literacy programs across the nation.

Equally alarming is the lack of investment in our higher education programs. President Bush's budget fails to make college more affordable because it fails to address rising college costs, the declining buying power of college grants, or the rising debt carried by college students. As parents and students alike watch the cost of attending college rise by historic levels, the Bush Administration provides no relief and no support.

Instead, President Bush once again has proposed freezing the size of the maximum Pell grant. The Bush Administration has thrown around rhetoric that they have increased funding in this program by billions. Its just that – rhetoric. The FY 2005 Bush budget marks the third year in a row that the maximum Pell grant would remain at \$4,050.

This freeze comes at a time when rapidly rising college costs have negatively impacted the ability of low and middle-income students to go to college. In fact, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education has estimated that 250,000 students were shut out of college opportunities this school year due to rising college costs.

President Bush has yet to make good on his 2000 campaign promise to make college more affordable by increasing the maximum Pell Grant for college freshman to \$5,100, even though the grant is now worth \$500 *less* than the maximum grant in 1975-76, adjusted for inflation, nearly 30 years ago!

The Bush budget also forces a tax on college loans that would charge students an additional \$4 billion over the next 10 years by requiring lenders to collect a 1 percent insurance fee when students take out their college loans. Currently, lenders have the option not to charge students this fee.

The Bush budget also cuts \$316 million vocational education funding – again. Federal vocational education programs have strong bipartisan support, as demonstrated by congressional rejection of past efforts by the Bush Administration to cut these programs. President Bush has proposed a new job training initiative for community colleges in his Labor Department Budget. This proposal masks the real record of Bush Administration support for community colleges.

Since President Bush took office, he has proposed over \$1.8 billion in cuts to vocational education and job training programs for community colleges. These cuts would have had devastating effects, denying training and educational opportunities to thousands of students.

The Bush Budget does propose yet another \$1 billion increase for special education, as in prior years. However, at this rate of increase, we will never reach IDEA full funding, which we promised the nation's school districts over 28 years ago. The Bush Administration dismisses the bipartisan support for reaching full funding, as illustrated in the letter being circulated by Congressman Bass and other Republican Members in support of a \$2.5 billion increase in IDEA funding in FY 2005.

Lastly, I want to express my disappointment that the Secretary Paige's Department of Education continues to use Enron accounting procedures to distort the real record on education funding.

Secretary Paige responds to charges about underfunding of education programs by asserting that states have over \$5.7 billion in unspent funds from the past 3 fiscal years. He also claims that states have enough funding to comply with No Child Left Behind and IDEA. These claims are nothing but smoke and mirrors.

As the Secretary knows full well, the Department is counting as unexpended funds billions of dollars in resources that the states have already designated for renovation of schools, teacher salaries and the purchase of testing system and curriculum. In fact, the Administration has provided us documentation that States are expending their funds at a rate *faster* than expected by the Department.

Very simply, these funds aren't "unspent," and the Secretary knows it. Go to your school board members, schools and teachers. Ask them if they have the resources they need. Ask them if they have enough funding to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, or IDEA. You will get a dose of reality. With State budgets continuing to be slashed, you will find the need even greater than past years.

Mr. Chairman, this Committee is faced with an issue of priorities. We cannot continue to ignore the funding needs of our K-12 and postsecondary education systems. This budget submitted by the Bush Administration prioritizes tax cuts for the wealthy over education funding for the disadvantaged for the third year in a row. It is not enough to proclaim yourself the "education President." You need to provide leadership and make the decisions that strengthen our schools, eliminate the achievement gap, and make college affordable to all.

The Administration's Budget fails our students, our teachers, our schools, and our communities. They look to us for support, and they get smoke and mirror budgets and photo ops in classrooms. We must do better for our children and our future.